

# Shenandoah

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Winter, 1950

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John Bowen

## *from* THE PRETENDERS

### I

Chris walked slowly out of the kitchen and behind the counter to the coffee urn. She drew a cup of coffee and walked over to the booth to join her father and mother.

"Mom, Dad," Chris greeted as she sat down. She meant it to sound pleasant, but instead it just sounded tired.

"How do you feel, Chris?" the Greek asked.

She smiled faintly. "O. K., Dad. Just a little tired."

The mother looked at the Greek, as if to speak, then decided against it.

"You'd better rest tonight," the Greek answered. To work hard and then a short rest was his cure for everything.

"Can't. There's a party at the Thomasons."

"Party? You going?"

"Yeah."

"What's the party for?" He said it as though he was completely innocent, or ignorant, as the case might be, of the function of social life. In truth, he never thought about parties and the like. He never had to—he never went to them. He had been invited several times, but had not gone. He could not see that they served a purpose in his life.

Chris shrugged. "What's the difference? They're all alike. I don't know that there's any special occasion for this one. It's just a party."

"No occasion?" The Greek was stupified. "Then why're you going?"

"Oh, I don't know," Chris said.

The Greek was completely bewildered by the reply. He looked

at his wife, seeking an explanation. The wife stared back at him stonily. She did not care to express her thoughts.

"Who are you going with?" the Greek asked finally, recovering partially from his confusion.

"Randy."

"Randy?"

"I met him at a party a while back."

Again the Greek was bewildered by the social web. He promptly changed the subject. "How's the coffee?"

"O. K."

"Good, huh? I make good coffee, huh?" The self-praise did not impress either of them, and the coffee did not impress the drinker.

The mother spoke. "Chris, get me a cup of coffee, will you?"

Chris said nothing. She continued to look at the cup before her.

"Chris is tired," the Greek said. "She worked all last night . . ."

"All right, all right," the mother said, somewhat irritated.

"I'll get it for you," the Greek said. He brought her the coffee and sat down in the booth again.

"Dad, I'll need some money," Chris said.

The Greek was surprised. "But you just got paid Friday."

"I needed some clothes. I spent it all."

The Greek mulled the answer over in his mind for an instant, then promptly surrendered several bills. He gave the impression that he was lost in the social maze again.

"Enough?" he asked.

Chris picked up the bills and looked at them, then stuffed them into her pocketbook. "Yeah, thanks."

The Greek started to remind her that it would come from her next week's pay, but didn't. He wanted to teach his children the value of money, but he never could bring himself to deducting their debts on payday.

"She's a fine girl," the Greek said after Chris had left.

The mother looked at him but did not reply.

"Works hard, never gets into trouble. She's one fine girl," the Greek said. He suddenly remembered Jeannie. "Both are fine girls." He looked at the clock. It was past time for Jeannie to come down. "You watch the counter while I call Jeannie," he said.

"There won't be any customers," the wife said.

"Mebbe." The wife was facing the front of the restaurant. The Greek looked that way as he got up. It was dark outside.

Upstairs, the Greek gently shook the boy to waken him. The boy sat up and looked around sleepily.

"Time to go back to work," the Greek said in a fatherly manner. "Dishes are piling up."

The boy did not answer. He rose and walked out of the room and down the steps. The Greek followed him into the hallway and knocked on Jeannie's door. "Jeannie!" he called.

The knock sounded hollow. There was no answer from inside the room. "Jeannie," he repeated. "Time for work." He listened for a moment, then pushed the door and entered the room. The lights were burning, but no one was there.

He searched through the back rooms, then returned downstairs. He was surprised to see Chris entering the front door.

"Forgot my pocketbook," she explained.

"Where's Jeannie?" he asked her.

Chris shrugged. "She was upstairs a few minutes ago."

"She's not there now," the father commented.

"She had a date," Chris said. "But I told her I wouldn't work for her."

The Greek turned and called to the boy in the kitchen. The boy stuck his head through the serving window. "Yesir?"

"You seen Jeannie?"

"No, sir." The Greek turned to Chris again. The boy, seeing he was no longer on call, turned again to the dishes.

"You'll have to work 'til Jeannie comes in," the Greek told Chris.

"I knew that was coming," Chris responded belligerently. "And I won't do it."

"But I haven't got anybody to tend the register," the father complained.

"Jeannie's supposed to do it. Go find her," Chris said stubbornly.

"Now, Chris. Won't you just take it for a little while. She'll be back in a minute. She's probably just gone to the corner."

"No!" Chris flashed. "I worked last night and today, and dammit, I'm tired. I won't do it."

"Now, Chris," the father said appeasingly.

"No!"

The father flushed. "Chris, you do what I tell you. You work 'til Jeannie comes back."

Chris looked at her father indifferently. "No," she said. She picked up the pocketbook from the booth and walked out. The screen door slammed hard behind her.

"Chris!" the father called, hurrying after her. She was already out of sight when he reached the sidewalk. The father looked at the sidewalk silently, like a man who had been unkind and was sorry for having done it.

He heard a laugh as he entered the restaurant and turned to see his wife watching him. He flushed angrily but said nothing. The wife's continued laughing irritated him, blinding him with rage. He wanted to grab her and crush the life out of her, savagely, mercilessly. He knew he could, too—she was so tiny compared to him and so fragile. One flex of his muscles and he would be free of her taunting laughter. But the muscles that had so often drawn her to him tenderly, lovingly, revolted against the flames in his brain and would not respond to their call. Too, he was afraid of her. There was something about her that frightened him and he wanted to run away—run away from the power over him that he could not understand or explain.

"Go find Jeannie," the wife mocked as he sat down in the booth.

The Greek did not reply. The injection of anger had given way to the characteristic practicality of his race. He was thinking of how he could fill the gap created by Jeannie's absence. He needed someone to tend register. His wife could; he could ask her. He looked at her hopefully, then lowered his eyes and stared at the top of the table. He was frightened to ask her and it made him feel ashamed.

"Well," the wife laughed. "What are you going to do?"

He tried to shrug it off. "Oh, I'll manage." But he knew that his work that night would be doubled.

"Why don't you get the boy to tend register?"



The Greek glanced quickly at the kitchen to see if the boy was within hearing range of the wife's sarcastic suggestion. The door was closed and he could not see the boy. He breathed a sigh of relief and scowled at his wife.

"You leave the boy alone," he said firmly. "He's the only one here who has any sense."

The wife was surprised by the sharp comeback. For an instant she was speechless, then she came back defensively. "Well, I like *that!*"

"No matter what you like," the Greek warned. "You leave the boy alone."

"Don't care what the drunks that stagger in here say to your daughters, but leave the boy alone."

His flash of defiance gone, the Greek stared silently at the table top. "Where can Jeannie be," he said thoughtfully as if talking to himself.

"She went out."

The Greek was surprised and stared bewildered at his wife.

"I saw her pass the front of the store," the wife said. "She came down the front way."

"You saw her?"

"Yeah."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Why should I?"

"She's supposed to work. You knew that."

"That's no business of mine."

"You—you—Where'd she go?"

The wife shrugged.

"Where'd she go?" the Greek repeated menacingly.

"How should I know?"

"You know! You know!"

"Are you caling me a liar?"

"You know! You know!" the Greek repeated as though they were the only two words in his vocabulary at that moment.

"Why, you bastard! Call your own wife a liar."

"When is she coming back?"

"How the hell should I know?"

"Liar!" the Greek screamed, seemingly mocking the wife's former classification.

"You bastard," the wife growled. She got up angrily and stalked through the kitchen and up the steps to the second floor.

The Greek did not move. He stared at the table top and mumbled "liar" over and over again.

A few minutes later, a customer entered the store and sat down at the counter. The Greek glared at him sullenly for an instant, then walked behind the counter.

With an effort, he brought his anger under control, twisting his face into an obviously painful smile.

"Yes, sir," he said.

## II

The Greek cursed silently. Damn-these-flies, damn-these-flies, damn-these-flies. He had said it so often that it now seemed to be one word to him, so that it should be hyphenated when written down. He knew other curse words—much less respectable—but he almost never used them. "Damn" seemed to convey all the sense of futility and need, of anger and disgust, of hatred and contempt that was necessary in any situation that he had faced or was likely to face.

He took the damp rag from beneath the counter and wiped it over the counter. The flies popped up into the air before the swing of his arm, and then settled to the counter again.

The Greek stopped swabbing and looked at the flies. He thought of Jeannie. Not that there was any association in his mind between her and the flies. It was just the thinking of an idle, tired, worried and bewildered mind.

When she had come in last night, Jeannie had used the hotel entrance to avoid him and this morning he had not wanted to awaken her when he got up to open the restaurant. At noon, when he had gone upstairs again she was gone. He wondered why she was avoiding him and why she had suddenly become so secretive. It was not like her; she was always candid and open with him.

Was always? Maybe not now, but formerly, yes. When she was a small girl—in his mind, he formed a picture of the tiny, dark-complexioned pig-tailed girl, with the running nose and

the dirty face—she had confided in him all of the hiding places of her childish possessions. And what places—places that he would never have found unless he stumbled across them, because they were so obvious. Once, he remembered finding a rock under the counter behind his favorite beer mug. He had never noticed it before then, and it had surprised him. It had even irritated him a little and he had scolded her about bringing trash into the restaurant. She had cried—not so much from the scolding as from being found out, he had thought at the time—and he ended by confiding in her where he kept his talisman, the small bag of Grecian soil which his father had carried over to the New Land.

After that, they had no secrets between them. She had showed him the cache of beads she had collected for her dolls. Those beads she had found lying loose in the back yard, and had restrung. The mother fumed for days over losing the beads, although they weren't valuable, but the Greek had never told her about the doll's beads.

The Greek had many stories and memories he had wanted to tell her. But he hadn't. They were tales for the ears of a son—a son who could and would understand their importance to the Greek and to himself. He had no son, so he never told the stories.

Later, after she had begun to grow from childhood, the Greek had begun calling her "Pal." He never quite remembered where the nickname came from or how he had started it. It just happened. One day he called her "Pal." It made him feel good inside and proud and it had stuck.

The Greek looked down and saw flies scrambling around the counter. He reached a swatter from the wall and made several quick jabs at them.

Yes, he had even listened to her tell of her first love, had even shook hands with the young fool, all the time wondering how she could have made such a mistake.

The Greek laughed and swatted the flies again, this time more out of good-humor than duty.

No, he decided, it was not like Jeannie to avoid him. She had just gone out for something. She would tell him when she got back. He'd find out soon. He'd...

"Cup of coffee and a hamburger."

He turned as a fat, jovial-faced man sat down and leaned his arm on the counter. The man was perspiring profusely, the sweat mingling with soot on his face to cause thin, alternating black and white stripes.

"H'lo, Bill," the Greek said. "How's the railroad?"

"Still there, dammit. Hamburger and coffee."

The Greek jabbed a cup under the spigot and flicked the handle of the urn. "What do you want on it?" he asked as he set the steaming coffee before the customer.

"The works."

The Greek noticed the boy standing in the kitchen as he reached into the icebox for the hamburger meat. The boy was leaning across the table set before the serving window. His arms were lying on the table and his head lay on his arms.

Let 'im rest a minute, the Greek thought, as he slapped the meat on the griddle. Been working hard all afternoon. Deserves a rest.

The Greek turned and looked out the front window. For an instant he thought he saw Jeannie. Then, he saw it was just a girl who was on her way home after a day's work. He thought about Jeannie. Where could she be? He stared at the window blankly, as if watching nothing and at the same time watching a panorama of living pictures.

"Hey The hamburger!"

"Huh?" he breathed, surprised.

"The hamburger."

The Greek turned and looked at the frying meat. It had almost burned while he was thinking. "Oh," he said.

But had he been thinking? He didn't know, and he was surprised that he didn't know. He couldn't remember what he had thought about, if he had thought of anything. It seemed as if he had become nothing for an instant. Or maybe he had become part of the sunlight outdoors that was glaring down on the street or maybe he had become associated with the heat it imparted. Or maybe he had even become a part of the heat from the griddle or the chill the meat had had before he dropped it on the griddle. He didn't know what he had been associated with, but it seemed he had been disassociated from himself. It must have been inani-

mate, for he felt there had been no motion in the flicker of lost time, no movement. Just stillness.

"What's the matter?" Bill asked.

"Huh? Oh, nothing." He placed the hamburger before the customer. "Nothing."

"Then how about some stuff on the hamburger?"

The Greek looked at the hamburger as if it should have known itself that something went with it. "Oh, sorry," he said. He added mustard, onions and tomato from a table near the griddle.

"How's that?"

"Fine." The man looked at him critically for a moment, then shrugged. "Sure is hot outside," he said.

"Yeah." The Greek picked up some dirty dishes and carried them to the serving window. The boy was still resting with his head on his arms. The Greek reached through the window and put the dishes on the table. The boy lifted his head as he heard them rattle, looked at them for an instant, then carried them to the sink and began cleaning them.

"Hey, boy," the Greek said through the serving window. His voice was naturally harsh, but his inflection was fatherly. The boy looked toward him.

"Why don't you let them go 'til you get a pile," the Greek said. "It'd be easier that way."

"I don't want to get behind," the boy said plainly, and turned again to washing the dishes.

The Greek watched him for a moment. "Hey, boy," he said suddenly. "Why don't you go upstairs and take a rest?"

"I will," the boy said, without turning his head, "as soon as I finish here."

The Greek watched the boy wash and dry a few dishes and then head up the stairs. Watching him, the Greek wondered what it was about the boy that attracted him. His spirit? The boy didn't show much outwardly, but the Greek felt that inside the boy it was dammed back, compact and powerful but restrained. Someday, he thought, he'd be a great man.

He had the makings. The boy was industrious, sometimes even to foolish proportions like not letting the dishes pile up. That pleased the Greek. The boy was so different from the members

of the Greek's family. They were always trying to get out of work. The Greek felt the boy—like an artist turned to rock crushing—didn't appreciate his task, but accepted it as a necessary step in the long road ahead. Some day the boy would be a great man.

That was it. That was what the Greek has been trying to figure out. That was why the Greek always felt strange when he looked at the boy—felt as he did when he looked at the great statue in Wilson Park. That was it! There was a telescopic giant within the boy, now retracted but soon to be extended to its full length of greatness.

The Greek smiled and walked back to where the customer was sitting. "Good boy," he said. "Lotsa spirit, lotsa work." He said it as if he had made some great philosophical discovery and wished his friend to know of his good fortune immediately.

"Yeah," the other replied.

"You betcha," the Greek said.

The man drained his coffee and flipped a quarter on the counter. "Be seein' ya," he said.

"Sure, Bill. Come back again."

"Yeah."

The Greek stuck the quarter in his pocket and cleared and wiped the counter. Then he carried the dishes to the serving window, remarking that the boy would have to let them pile up for a while now.

He wondered about the boy. He had been left an orphan when his parents died. Some friends had taken him into their home and got him the job. The boy never complained, but he never seemed happy either. There must be something that the Greek could do for him. Suddenly, a thought flashed across his mind. By damn, he thought, I'll adopt him. I'll make him my son. Then I can give him a good bringing up and put him through high school. Maybe even send him to college. Yes, by damn, he'd start saving right now for the boy's education. Hamburgers! That was it. The money from every hamburger he sold, he'd save to send the boy to college. The boy would like that, he knew he would. But he wouldn't tell him now. Wait 'til the boy grew some. Then he could tell him.

The Greek took the quarter from his pocket and carefully

looked at it. Then, he put a soup bowl beside the cash register and dropped the quarter into it.

"By damn," he breathed. "If anybody takes that I—I'll kill em."

As if to demonstrate his intentions, he picked up the fly swatter and swung violently at the flies which stuck to the hot window pane of the front window as though too fatigued by the weight of the air to move farther.

"That I'll do, by damn," he vowed.

### III

At the head of the stairs, the boy stopped, surprised, and stared down the hallway. A door had just opened, and the Greek's wife stepped into the hallway, laughing loudly and straightening her dress. A heavy, sallow man stood in the doorway looking at her intensely. He grasped her by the shoulder and ran his hand over her arm and tried to pull her closer to him. They stood there looking at each other for an instant. Thick, bluish smoke drifted out the top of the open doorway and crept furtively across the hall ceiling as if trying to sneak away without being noticed.

The Greek's wife laughed and brushed the man's hand away as she saw the boy. The man looked in that direction. His face showed surprise and disappointment, and his manner indicated he was not quite sure what to do now.

The woman gave the man a little push. "See you later," she whispered. Then, she wheeled and walked past the boy and down the steps. The man, standing half in the doorway, looked at the boy for an instant and tried to decide a course of action.

"Hey, boy," he said suddenly. "Come here."

The boy obediently walked to the door.

"Here's a quarter," the man said. "You didn't see nothing."

The boy looked at the quarter in his hand, not quite knowing what was happening.

"Understand?" the man said.

The boy shook his head. He really didn't understand.

"You didn't see nothin,' see?"

Instinct had told the boy that something was wrong when he first saw the Greek's wife emerging from the man's room. That feeling was sustained by the man's action.

"Go buy yourself a soda," the man continued. "You didn't see nothin.' He wheeled and slammed the door. The boy stared at the closed door for an instant, then walked down the hall and entered his room.

In an adjoining room, Jeannie was putting on her coat.

"Hi!" she called to him.

He mumbled a reply and sat down on the side of the bed. Jeannie jabbed at her hair with a brush to give it a finishing touch and then entered the room.

"Tired?" she asked, sitting down on the beside beside him.

He lied. "No."

Jeannie smiled affectionately and brushed the hair back out of his face. "Of course not, but a rest'll help just the same."

She leaned his head on her shoulder and smoothed his hair. Suddenly, a horn sounded on the street below. She jumped up, letting him tumble sideways to the floor.

"Oh!" she said, helping him up. "I'm sorry, honey. Did it hurt?" He shook his head.

"I'm sorry, honey, really," she said, kissing him on the forehead. "Be seeing you."

When she was out of hearing, he lay down on the bed. Sadly, he stared at the ceiling of the room. He was jealous, with a jealousy that he could not understand. But he could feel it—it was a part of his being, actually commingling with his blood and flesh. Somewhere at that moment the man was with her, enjoying her presence, her joy, the warmth of her body. The boy bit his lip and strained to hold off the sorrow that attacked his body like an infection.

He lay there for a long time, watching the room deepen in shadows. He longed for Jeannie's presence and the more he thought of her, the more he hungered for her to be near him. She should be, he thought. He felt that she should be. There was some indefinable bond between them that instinct informed him of but did not explain to him. Instead of becoming farther away from him, the more he thought of her, the nearer she seemed to be. In his mind, she was walking slowly, dramatically, through the shadows that were invading the room and she was a part of them. They seemed to blend together—she and the shadows—until one



was almost indistinguishable from the other. And yet he could see her clearly, smiling at him and beckoning him to come to her side, to climb into her protective arms and lay his head upon her shoulder.

He heard a noise in the hallway and, for an instant, thought she might be returning. But he knew she had not. Inside, he knew it. She had gone out; she never returned for several hours, sometimes more, when she went out. He half-closed his eyes and lay silent, not for any particular reason. He was at that moment indifferent to what the noise might produce.

In the semi-darkness, he saw the Greek's wife stop at the doorway and glance in. Then she walked silently down the hall. She might have been tiptoeing, she was so silent.

A few moments later he heard the muffled voices of the woman and the roomer. A door closed, quickly but softly, and he could no longer hear the voices.

The room was almost completely dark now, except for the tiny lance of light that shot into the room from the hallway, and he could no longer see Jeannie in the shadows. He closed his eyes and wondered why the wife had gone to the man's room.

Almost as suddenly as he had thought of it, he forgot it. He was tired and the press seemed to press heavily against his body. His back tingled and his head ached a little. A soft breeze now coming through a window eased the fatigue somewhat and sharpened his mind again. A breeze had been blowing like that the night his mother died. He remembered it distinctly. Why, he did not know. But he remembered it. He always had. And it always made him think of that night and his mother...

He awoke with a start, frightened. Instinctively he could feel danger was near and some disaster impending. It came to him in a flash as if someone had whispered it in his ear. He listened but could hear nothing for an instant. Then he heard a door down the hall open and the voices of the Greek's wife and the roomer mingling together. They were subdued and secretive and hinting at pleasure. They laughed softly.

The Greek's wife walked past the door and down the steps. Before her steps had died away, he heard a door close. A moment later he saw the Greek step from a dark room across the hall. He

stared for an instant in the direction from which the wife had come, then he entered the boy's room. He fumbled in a drawer for an instant and returned to the lighted hallway.

The Greek stood in the hallway, framed by the door, and fumbling with something that had a metallic ring. The boy heard the sharp, precise click of fine metal. When the Greek turned, the boy saw he was holding a revolver in his hand.

The boy was so surprised he almost cried out. He was frightened and sweating profusely. He had never seen the Greek like this before. The Greek was hard and drawn and his eyes were cold. He too was sweating profusely. His mouth was drawn into a thin, firm line.

The Greek looked down the hallway for a long time. The revolver hung limply in his hand by his side, but the rest of his body seemed unnaturally tense, like a snake about to uncoil its force against an enemy.

The Greek hesitated and looked at the gun. Then he stuffed the revolver into his belt and walked heavily down the steps.

#### IV

They had become more frequent lately, so frequent in fact that it was sometimes hard to tell where one left off and the other began. Sometimes he would wake up in the places and not remember having gone there. Sometimes he would clear his mind and just not remember. He never had a headache or any outward signs of illness when he again became aware of his actions. He was just aware that a fraction of time—sometimes as much as an hour—was blank as if rudely denied presence in his memory.

He had gone to see the doctor, or at least he had almost gone to see the doctor. He had become worried and had decided suddenly one morning to consult a doctor. The doctor would fix him up, dig behind the membrane of his delinquent mind and fix him up.

He had walked out of the restaurant with a sure step, full of confidence and relief because it would all be cleared up soon. He had sustained that confidence until he had reached the lobby of the building in which the doctor's office was located. Then he had faltered. It was a big step for him from the lobby into the

elevator and the ancient elevator seemed unusually fast in transporting him to the right floor. It had been an even bigger step from the elevator into the fifth story hallway and a gruelling, long walk to the door of the doctor's office. The last step, the one that would place him in the presence of the snappy, efficient secretary, who would lead him to the inner recess of the doctor's office, was the biggest step of all, seemingly almost insurmountable, and for him actually not achieved.

Before the door with the big black letters, he had stopped and waited. He had even reached for the door handle but had never touched it. He imagined telling the story to the doctor who infrequently jotted down snatches of information and listened with a professionally interested mien and all the time was personally unconcerned. He saw himself sitting in the richly lacquered chair and squirming, squirming because he felt so foolish and knowing he was playing the role of a fool.

He had recoiled a step and had looked at the door for an instant, waiting. Had someone suddenly thrown open the door and burst into the hallway, he would have had to enter. To stand there awkwardly and not enter would have made him appear even more foolish. Inwardly, he prayed that the door would open and admit him, no, force him to enter. But help did not come from an innocent patient, and he had retreated from the building, regretting that he had not taken that last step. He had almost even stopped and turned back, but the human swirl on the sidewalk seemed to catch him up and carry him away, hiding him from the prying eyes of the doctor and from his own strained conscience.

Now he found himself at the foot of the stairway behind the kitchen, bewildered and wondering how he had come to be there. He felt something hard pressing against his stomach and was surprised to see the revolver under his belt.

Dazedly, he tried to reconstruct. He had gone upstairs to wake up the boy and had heard his wife laughing and a man's voice answering. For no reason that he could remember now, he had stepped into a dark room as he heard a door open and . . . .

But of the time between that moment and now, when he was standing at the foot of the stairs, he could remember nothing.

The time between was as dark as the room which he had hidden in. But why had he hidden? What had he seen? When had he taken the gun from the drawer and what had he intended doing with it? Why could he not remember what had happened during those few brief moments?

He shuddered. He noticed that his hands were shaking and tried to calm himself and reason out the situation. Of course, that was it. He had planned to have the gun cleaned. It had been in the drawer a long time out of use. It needed a good cleaning. And the dark room? Simple enough. He had entered the room to get the gun.

He breathed deeply, somewhat relieved, and entered the restaurant. His wife was sitting in a booth. He walked to the cash register and slipped the gun under the counter without letting her see it. She might become alarmed upon seeing a gun.

The restaurant was empty of customers, so he walked over and sat down opposite his wife in the booth. "Where were you?" he asked, suddenly remembering the unexplained laughter and voices.

She looked at him but did not reply.

"You look tired," he said. She did look tired, but he had no particular reason for mentioning it.

The wife shrugged.

"I heard you laughing upstairs."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

"Any law against laughing?"

"No."

"Well?"

"Well?"

"Then it isn't a crime to laugh."

"I thought you were out."

She smiled. "Obvious I wasn't."

"You said you were going out."

"I did, but I came back. I can do that, can't I?"

"Yeah." He paused for an instant. "I heard a man's voice."

"Good for you."

"Upstairs."

"Let's hope our roomers can talk."

The Greek bit his lip. What he was about to say was painful to him. "With you."

The wife stared at him, surprised. Her hard shell showed a finite crack. "What else?" she managed.

The Greek stared at the top of the table. "Nothing," he said quietly.

The wife smiled. "You're dreaming," she said, her confidence returned.

The Greek was surprised. "What makes you say that?"

"Nothing. You're just talking crazy."

He flushed. "Don't say that."

"Why not?" she said, surprised at his remark.

"Nothing."

She shrugged.

The Greek took his eyes from the table and looked at his wife. Again, he became aware of how tired she looked. "This heat is terrible," he said. "You have to watch yourself."

"Yeah."

There was a moment of silence.

"Well," the Greek said finally, "I better go wake the boy."

## WILLIAMSBURG, VIRGINIA

For all the world like some exotic hen—  
Her motley wings spread, clucking to her brood—  
The guide, hoop-skirted, beckoned tourists when  
Enough had huddled. In a chick-like mood,  
Our downy interest followed her around  
The pseudo-eighteenth century Capitol.  
We made appropriate cheeps when she had found  
(Though not by accident!) some wonderful  
Worm of antiquity.

Easter, we thought,  
Comes daily here. Our thoughts were painted eggs  
As we examined china guide-hens bought  
In later shops—each trinket one that begged  
To be permitted, in our distant rooms,  
To flaunt their reminiscent china plumes.

JOHN NIXON, JR.

## SUNDAY MORNING

The sound  
of the arrogant church bells  
scrapes sleep  
from minds absorbed  
with rest and death  
in careful beds.

Behind the house  
a cat walks  
with the white feet of a king  
among overturned garbage pails.

And in the drugged streets  
the people  
oh the ponderous people!  
move  
in silence  
deeper than a dream.

THOMAS H. CARTER

## CURB YOUR EXPRESSION

New England barns, New England  
weather,  
inclement,  
use the Northeastern Framing System,  
almost as indestructible  
as all the sentimental of them.

They are invariable white or not white  
shutters,  
flowers,  
and everybody has them, some use them.  
But they are part of that which magazines  
know is what we know, New England.

And in the South, in Lexington, or near there,  
Shakers'  
weather,  
others creosoted, superimposed black,  
an either red, white, or no door,  
almost an abstraction with the grass.

They furnish horses, for the  
rich,  
religious  
use them, in Lexington, for barns and things.  
All are in the very strict,  
Post and Lintle, primitive, tradition.



It is poetic theory, that, beyond  
wisdom,  
naïveté,  
which is the true sophistication;  
or else, smugness, and this has absolutely  
nothing to do with what I am saying.

But, not beside the point, in  
Indiana,  
god  
dam, etc., a barn's a barn, it doesn't matter  
if the Mail Pouch people pay, a  
coat of paint is better than whitewash.

JOHN RAWLINGS



## POEM

"nothing" the unjust man complained  
"is just" ("or un—" the just rejoined

E. E. CUMMINGS

## POEM

Green night has misinformed  
this cat who thinks himself  
such a savage sabre-tooth.  
Silently he goes—  
a shadow deeper than simpering trees.

Reflections of the stars  
pass a white word to  
the shallow waiting pond.  
Here things live.

Disdaining the clutch  
of weeds, the cat leans  
far over to consider  
the imaged sky implanted  
beneath the grave water.

One deadly paw jabs  
at a shining slim fish,  
which slides away. No matter.  
The predator has wiser plans.

Craftily he waits,  
as fireflies ponder on his scheme—  
for this mad cat  
would siphon up the moon.

THOMAS H. CARTER

## BOOK REVIEWS

ACROSS THE RIVER AND INTO THE TREES. By Ernest Hemingway. Scribner's. pp. 308. \$3.00 (1950)

Hemingway has been a fairly productive writer for more than twenty-five years without much modification of the well-known Hemingway attitude. Long before the publication of this novel, he was a predictable writer. Given a limited number of situations (the range has never been wide), almost any attentive reader could anticipate what Hemingway would do with them. Robert Penn Warren summarized the characteristic attitude in an able and sympathetic introduction to a new edition of *A Farewell to Arms* (Scribner's, 1949). Violent people, he said, move through a naturalistic world in which "the shadow of ruin is behind the typical Hemingway situation." The end of this world is in nothing; so the "sure compensation in life, the only reality, is gratification of appetite, the relish of sensation." Hemingway's men, the good ones, are knowing hunters and fishermen, athletic in duck blind or bedroom, and remarkable all-day drinkers. Though the core of life is nothingness, there is a way, beyond sensation, to rebel against it, through what Warren calls the "characteristic discipline." Catherine's death in *A Farewell to Arms* is an accident, but the manner of her dying gives it meaning and dignity. The mere event cannot diminish "the value of the effort, or . . . the value of the discipline, the code, the stoic endurance, the things that make it true—or half true—that 'nothing ever happens to the brave.'"

In the Hemingway world, Warren observes, the "general human community, the general human project, has gone to pot. There is only the little secret community of, paradoxically enough, individualists who have resigned from the general community, and who are strong enough to live without any of the illusions, lies, and big words of the herd . . . They recognize each other, they know the password and the secret grip, but they are few in number, and each is set off against the world like a wounded lion ringed round by waiting hyenas."

Jake, Frederick Henry, Harry Morgan, and Robert Jordan are the wounded lions of the novels, and the catalogue can be extended through many of the short stories in which the theme of the undefeated is recurrent. The trickiest handling is in "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber": "short" because Macomber lives truly for about twenty minutes of the brief space his wife permits him after he has learned the Hemingway code; "happy" because he has at last estimated the value of the discipline. Before the life begins, Macomber is a child, one of the great American boy-men, and thus an unusual Hemingway central male. The others never have to develop but seem born with hair on their chests, a Purdey shot-gun at the ready, a talent for understatement, and an instinct for the code. They are as stylized as Fenimore Cooper's Natty Bumppo and just as anti-intellectual, crowd-hating, and nature-loving.

Hemingway's style, or method, has been as formalized as the attitude. And, of course, much admired and imitated. No American since Thoreau has written so well of the outdoors. His sure descriptions are admirable; the presentation of the problem of the bridge in *For Whom the Bells Toll* is a model of precision. He can convey intense internal emotion in terms of purely external objects and events, as in the short story, "Hills Like White Elephants." He has made effective use of symbolic action: Frederick Henry's plunge into the river after Caporetto is ablution. The familiar technique of calculated understatement gives his characteristic love story of despair—the star-crossed lovers against the backdrop of disintegration—a pity and tenderness not approached by any other novelist of his generation except Scott Fitzgerald. His fresh use of the old, old words is the result of a real integrity of craftsmanship.

Another quality remarkable in one whose method seems objective is the almost constant awareness the reader has of Hemingway. It was not by chance that he told the first two of his novels and many of the short stories in the first person. Even without a knowledge of the literary gossip he has always provoked, one can take the measure of Hemingway the Personality in his fiction, disregarding the books like *Death in the Afternoon* in which he put aside fiction altogether. He has never been unwilling to step into

a narrative, take it over for a paragraph or two, and then let the story go on. This has not been a weakness because of his own apparent identification with the main characters and the attitude. The Hemingway intrusion has usually been a logical extension of the viewpoint of his protagonist.

*Across the River and Into the Trees* is about the last two days in the life of Colonel Cantwell, fifty-one years old, in love, and preoccupied in the midst of life, with imminent death. He has a failing heart. The colonel hunts, makes love, drinks mightily, and keeps himself going with drugs. He reviews in his mind and in conversations with his girl the meaningful events of his career, and makes comments on war. He is a tough guy with good motivations calloused over by what he has seen. He yields not an inch to anything: "Maybe I will get Christian toward the end. Yes, he said, maybe you will. Who wants to make a bet on that?"

This most recent book has the tightest construction of any of the novels, and is the only one told from a single point-of-view not related in the first person. Hemingway frames his narrative with a duck shoot to open and close the action, developing his story with flashbacks. He has chosen to tell Cantwell's story in staccato fashion, using shorter, less complicated sentences and briefer paragraphs than in *For Whom the Bells Toll*. This is the first time Hemingway has used the framework pattern in a long narrative.

Hemingway's craftsmanship has always been very delicate, however tough the subject matter. The last scene of *A Farewell to Arms* ("After a while I went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain"), a great success, was a precarious one to handle. Pressed even a little, overdone a touch, the best of Hemingway could be very bad. When he fails to make his readers take the Hemingway attitude with respect, as in *To Have and Have Not*, the result is close to self-parody. He was on the border of the most banal sentimentality in *The Sun Also Rises*, but the restraint of the telling saved the book. The failure of *Across the River and Into the Trees* is mostly in technique and taste. It is surely not due to the subject matter, since he has told virtually the same story before with skill.

Colonel Cantwell, viewer and interpreter of the action, com-

bines the tough and the precious. He is handy with his fists, even the bad one ("I dreamed it was the hand of our Lord," says his girl), and he knows vintage wines, "good" jewels, and food. He understands military tactics and approves of Dante, though he hates most other writers. He also despises the British. He thinks in scatological terms, as military men sometimes will; so be it. He could be looked at as a whole Jake or a Robert Jordan mauled by hyena-women, wars, and years. The colonel's arch relationship with a head waiter called the *Gran Maestro* reminds one of the New York great who grovel before saloon keepers; still, if that is the way he must be, he can be taken on his own terms.

The intrusive Hemingway betrays his own character. It is all very well for the colonel and his girl to exchange commonplaces about Americans abroad, falsies, virgins, military failures, and other matters dear to the hearts of deep thinkers, but when Hemingway steps in with the logical extension, in his own person, he identifies himself as a hearty endorser of ideas that would not flutter a seminar at Bennington. For the first time in a work of fiction Hemingway patronizes his readers. He tells us how to tip waiters ("exactly what he should be tipped plus twenty per cent"), that it is smart to like somebody named Red Smith, and how to drink. A fair amount of other information which I suspect Hemingway wanted to pass on to the provincials is palmed off as coming from the colonel by a useful "he thought." Much of the middle section is spoiled by Personality Humor and Inside Stuff that the Hemingway of twenty years ago would have scorned.

The soundest part of the novel is the frame. In the duck-shoot sequence, which Hemingway draws away from after the first chapter and comes back to thirty-nine chapters later, stretching it out to conclude the book, there is the authentic outdoor mood of the Nick Adams stories. Boatman and colonel establish a relationship in the old manner, through events not commented on and by meanings implicit in the barest exchange of words. The duck shoot is a fine short story. The novel may be a creaky extension. Disintegration is complete when the colonel meets his Grand Master in Chapter VII, a parody of the secret community part of the attitude so wonderfully realized in the billiard scene between Count Greffi and Frederick Henry in *A Farewell to Arms*.

Hemingway's hold on words has slipped in this novel (the "well"-chewing and "true"-kissing girl), and there are clumsy sentences: "Now, on his way into Venice, keeping strictly controlled and unthinking his great need to be there, the big Buick cleared the last of San Dona and came onto the bridge over the Piave."

Warren has observed in Hemingway "that there have been changes between early and late work, that there has been an increasing self-consciousness, that attitudes and methods that in the beginning were instinctive and simple have become calculated and elaborated." His remarks anticipated the failure of this book.

GEORGE H. FOSTER

PARADE'S END. By Ford Madox Ford. Knopf, New York. \$5.00 (1950)

I

*Parade's End* is a single volume containing four of Ford's earlier novels, *Some Do Not*, *No More Parades*, *A Man Could Stand Up* and *The Last Post*, and an introduction by Robie Macauley. The four novels, published originally over a five-year period (1924-1928), achieved only brief popularity. When they first appeared, they were considered as merely another group of "war novels." In the Knopf volume they appear as what they should be—one great novel—titled *Parade's End*. The whole volume is an accurate presentation of the personal and universal histories of several people and a country in the years immediately before, during, and after the first great war. This was a period in which tradition, the British moral aristocracy, was perishing due to the strains imposed by modernism, the new statism, while both elements were at the same time allied in fighting a devastating war.

Tradition is wounded and then dies before the sniping power of modernism. The pathos of tradition's death is that modernism's weapons are usually being aimed by opportunists. Christopher Tietjens, the epitome of landed aristocracy, bends slowly before the fire of Vincent Macmaster, Mrs. Duchemin, and the interim-war officials who have sensed the inevitable social upheaval and who have joined "the new movement" to further their own ambi-

tions. Valentine Wannop, representing the modernist element in *Some Do Not*, is actually closer to Tietjens than any other of his intimates. Although she represents the social change that is pushing him aside, she loves and admires him because of his respect for traditional decorum and pattern.

## II

The immediate purpose of *Some Do Not* is to indicate the pattern that the four novels (often called the Tietjens series) follow. Ford did not write the four novels so that each one would stand as a complete story in itself. The Tietjens story is a "saga" with each of the four novels concerned with a particular phase of the saga. *Some Do Not* is a novel that must be read carefully, for in it Ford introduces his themes, his people, and their conflicts. The characters and their actions symbolize and predict the strains and changes England will undergo in the years from 1914 to 1926. Ford wrote a history of those fateful years as shown by the lives of Christopher Tietjens, one of the last great landed aristocrats; Valentine Wannop, one of the first suffragettes; Vincent Macmaster, a parasitic opportunist; and Sylvia, Tietjens' unfaithful wife, but ultimately savior of his estates. The richness of the four novels is augmented by the portrayal of several other well-drawn characters, but they, in their turn, all refer to the main characters. Thus there should be no confusion as to the basic pattern of the saga.

Mr. Ford's characters are actually too complex to serve as mere symbols—indeed it is their complexity that keeps the series from becoming a barren recital of history—but if we are to consider *Some Do Not* as the novel that will enable us to identify the clashing themes and conflicts in *Parade's End*, we must take the temporary liberty of labelling the main figures in the books. Once we have established the pattern by this means, then we will consider more fully the paradoxes within the principal characters.

The first meeting of Christopher and Valentine is symbolic of the respect the conflicting ideals permit each other. It also symbolizes the triumph that modernism will eventually enjoy. The setting is a golf course where Tietjens ("I loathe the beastly game") is part of a foursome which has a brush with a group of



suffragettes. Valentine Wannop enlists his aid to help one of her friends escape the police. Tietjens succeeds in effecting her friend's escape. Valentine feels that she must explain herself to this man.

He rides in a dogcart through a dense fog with Valentine, and the dialogue symbolizes, again, a dawning realization of the fact that modernism might eventually triumph.

....He called out:

"Are you all right?" The cart might have knocked her down. He had, however, broken the convention.... His last thought came back to him. He had broken their convention: he had exhibited concern: like any other man.... He said to himself:

"By God! Why not take a holiday: why not break all conventions?"

When the war takes Tietjens from England, he is attacked socially by the opportunists at home, particularly by a banker named Brownlie. He is trapped into accepting this petty social attack because of the self-confining mores of his own traditional philosophy, the philosophy that forbids an active resistance to modernism.

"That was quite proper, for if the ennobled family of Brownlie were not of the Ruling Class—who had to go (to war) !—they were of the Administrative Class, who were privileged to stay...."

Mr. Ford establishes the underlying theme—the destruction of a system of life—by noting all the subtle ties, not by posting open notices of the fight due between the past and the present. But there are minor themes that are as capably handled as the major idea. In *Some Do Not*, love is the obvious motive of the story, not a simple love, but the triply-complex relationship between Tietjens and his wife; Tietjens and Valentine; and Sylvia and Valentine. Tietjens' wife, Sylvia, hates him because she understands him. Valentine loves Tietjens but understands him less than his wife. Tietjens endures his wife and yearns for Valentine, but can never bring himself to any overt demonstration of love for Valentine. But are traditionalism and modernism ever close enough to exist tranquilly together? Obviously not in the early

stages of the clash between the two philosophies, and so it is that Mr. Ford never allows Christopher and Valentine to indulge their love for each other.

*Some Do Not* also leaves one with the impression that Ford is writing history. But the dialogue and actions of his characters give the history of these times a personal meaning. The history is so neatly connected with the characters that a reader finds himself wondering about the outcome of a story that has already been told.

### III

*No More Parades* is concerned chiefly with what was referred to by GI's of the recent war as red tape and chicken. It is a recital of and report on the mounds of unnecessary paper work a base officer is buried under at a replacement depot. If there is a weak link in the series, this would be the novel to be inspected for lack of strength. Until Sylvia arrives in France and further demonstrates her determination to drive her always composed and superior husband to the breaking point, the novel is no more than a protest against military bureaucracy.

Sylvia's conduct results in Tietjens striking a fellow officer and insulting a General, both of whom have violated the privacy of their bedroom at the hotel where she and Christopher were preparing to retire for the night. The incident expands because of the many military and personal complications and misunderstandings involved, so that it is necessary to send Tietjens to the front in order to preserve the decorum of the depot where he is stationed.

### IV

The trenches, mud, and frustration are the backdrops for the third novel, *A Man Could Stand Up*. The greater portion of the book is taken up with a single day in the trenches. Ford uses the impressionist technique, the method in all four novels, more clearly here than in the preceding books. The characters react to a scene or action as they see it. There is little attempt at "descriptive" detail. He relates the subconscious association of images and symbols that his characters experience as a result of a situation. He does not depict the situation. His characters suggest it

for him. The reality of Tietjens' situation, in the trenches, is forced again and again on Tietjens' reflecting mind. He hears voices from a German mining tunnel beneath his feet, "Bringt dem Hauptman eine Kerze"; then he is snapped back to his immediate circumstances. The officers with whom he associates are all suffering from monotony, fear, and frustration. Inconsequential items are given ludicrously passionate attention. Only the frayed nerves of these men have survived the sacrifice of minds in this macabre life in the mud. The last incident in the trench section illustrates the tragic-comic plight of these men. After being buried by a German shell and escaping, Tietjens is confronted by his commanding officer—who relieves him of his command because of his dirty uniform.

The last part of the novel takes Tietjens to London, to an empty house with Valentine Wannop. They are in love; they have decided to violate convention. It appears as if he has at last decided to cast off the outmoded mores that had him trapped. They are visited by the physical and mental ghosts from the war which used to annoy and confound Tietjens, but they no longer worry or affect his state of mind.

## V

In *The Last Post*, Ford demonstrates even more fully that pure impressionist technique so clearly evident in the third novel. Ford accomplishes his denouement through the thoughts of Tietjens' brother, Mark, who, paralyzed in an outdoor bed, reflects on the Tietjens' estate called Groby. He considers Christopher's and Sylvia's child. This is the son who will inherit Groby and the tradition for which it stood. Mark ponders Sylvia's conduct and the events that have taken place in the preceding novels. Groby, Tietjens' son, and Sylvia sum up, in themselves, all the complexities of the preceding novels. The thoughts of Mark turn continually to Christopher Tietjens or to things which are concerned with him. Christopher appears only briefly at the end of the book. We see Christopher through the eyes and thoughts of other people, and these thought patterns are so skillfully woven that the intersection points never tend to destroy the novel's continuity and purpose.

In Mark's mind the events are reviewed from Tietjens' initial journey on a train with Macmaster ("A journey from the present into the future," according to Robie Macauley's brilliant preface to the volume) to the present fall of Groby into the hands of a Catholic. But Mark sees it all as no failure, rather as a retirement with honor. Virtue in the sense of adhering to the precepts of the Tietjens' traditional philosophy has been preserved. The series is resolved on a Faulknerian note of hope. The possibility of salvation lies in the exchange of the Groby tradition for the Catholic tradition. The hope for salvation is present despite the threat of modernism. Christopher Tietjens has been true to his own set of values and retires before the forces of moral anarchy and modernism, defeated outwardly, but inwardly proud and strong.

## VI

Having surveyed the history and major theme in *Parade's End*, let us take a closer view of the characters. Ford has drawn them almost too richly to permit an exhaustive analysis, but it is only by examination of the individual problems that the paradoxes within the people can be appreciated.

Christopher Tietjens possesses a brilliant mind—perhaps the most brilliant in all England. He has a tremendous knowledge of the classics, a remarkable talent for figures, and a fund of odd information and talents that enable him to entertain intelligent opinions on a variety of subjects. He is the past—a landed independent aristocrat in the most traditionally individualistic manner—and he is out of place in the present. He has a set of chivalric, humane rules that he applies to other men, nature, God, and women. Nothing can alter his determination to abide by these rules. He and his brother Mark are scornful of titles and ostentation. They remain above the petty court jealousies, secure in their identity as Tietjens of Groby.

Tietjens refuses to divorce his wife, Sylvia, despite her scandalous conduct. When she wires him, after running away with another man, that she is ready to return to him, he accepts. His rules require that a husband always provide a wife with a home. Despite Sylvia's repeated sins and infuriating actions, he never loses his composure. His rules require coolness in the face of calamity.

In one scene, at breakfast with Sylvia, Tietjens is presented as having an injured memory due to the effect of a shell burst in France. Sections of his vast knowledge are missing entirely. He confesses that he has been reading the encyclopedia to restore his knowledge. (This is a typical Fordian twist, England's greatest mind studying the encyclopedia.) His bank account is overdrawn. His wife tells him that her lies have driven his father to suicide, to which Tietjens replies: "I suppose the poor fellow knows better now. Or perhaps he doesn't . . . . . It doesn't matter." Once again his standards of conduct and philosophy fail to tremble before the neurotic schemes and attacks of his treacherous wife.

Sylvia is the most fascinating of all the Ford people. She is dedicated to bringing her husband to his knees. She hates his composure, his tolerance, his code, his knowledge, and most of all, his indifference. Paradoxically, hating Tietjens as she does, she cannot divorce him. No other man can mean anything to her, yet she encourages these other men so that she can have the satisfaction of turning them down. She is a Catholic, but an example of the moral anarchy of the times. She exists to try to make Tietjens show emotion because that would be a sign of weakness. While she is so terrifyingly busy trying to destroy Christopher, she is actually, but accidentally, his savior. The old estate called Groby, which is the source of Tietjens' individuality, is fated by legend to return to the hands of a Catholic. It is Christopher and Sylvia's son, a Catholic, who lives to inherit Groby and its traditions. That Sylvia should accomplish the material salvation is again a Ford paradox.

Valentine Wannop, who loves Tietjens but never understands him as his wife does, presents another interesting paradox. She is a complete realist. With the collapse of her family fortunes, she goes to work as a maid. Later she supports herself as a physical education teacher. When the same group of fair weather friends who have rejected Tietjens reject her company, she accepts their action as an expected and practical one. She does secretarial work for her mother who attempts to earn a living by writing. She and her mother are always in dire economic straits, but neither of them complain or look for loans from Tietjens.

Despite Valentine's ardent desire for modernism, she is re-

markably patient in waiting for Christopher, and trying to understand him. Outspoken and passionate in her opinions on social issues, she is tolerant and almost reticent about her man. Yet this failure to fight for him wins him for her, because his intimates drive him into her arms. She presents more of a problem to Sylvia because of her tolerance than she would if she had been more forward and had blatantly become Tietjens' mistress. She remains stoically above the jealous sniping gossip of the opportunists. She, who should be opposed to the Tietjens' estate and all it stands for, is respectful of it, and her family is saved by it. (Christopher's father leaves the Wannops money.) Sylvia, who is of the Tietjens' "class," tries to destroy the estate and all it stands for, but inadvertently becomes its savior.

## VII

Ford had no choice as to the basic factual situation at the end of the volume. History had decided the end as Ford wrote the novels. But the facts are not only an evaluation of the value of Tietjens' individuality as opposed to Sylvia's moral anarchy. Nor are the facts only an evaluation of the landed tradition's death before the new statism. Ford's skill in drawing his characters prevents history from deciding which philosophy was the right one. Ford lures his readers into the lives of his people. At the end of the volume, history has its influence, but the evaluation is up to the reader in so far as the reader has, by means of the impressionist method, been led into a psychological identification of himself with one of the central characters.

Ford's very subtle interchanging of person and theme (or individual and historical attitude) gives both width of scope and depth of intensity to *Parade's End*. This is not to say that the impressionist method is the only method of encircling a subject from every possible point of view, but Mr. Ford refuses to over-simplify the paradoxes in his extremely British characters, and he refuses to lose sight of the dominant theme which binds the paradoxes together.

JOHN R. TOBYANSEN

THE SHAPING SPIRIT: A STUDY OF WALLACE STEVENS. By William Van O'Connor. Henry Regnery Company, Chicago. pp. 146. \$2.75. (1950)

Although *Harmonium* appeared in 1923, *The Shaping Spirit* is the first book-length critical examination of an acknowledged great American poet. But even with the appearance of this book, there remains a mysterious lack of exegesis of Stevens' poetry. Since Stevens' production has not been slight, this lack is hard to explain. Leaving the small privately-printed editions out of account, the physical bulk of his poetry probably outweighs the serious criticism of it. This is the situation which obtains of a highly-praised poet with six major volumes to his credit in a critical climate which has been attacked for being too critical.

Mr. O'Connor suggests "it may be too early to attempt a full-scale examination." O'Connor's "primary intention has been neither to eulogize nor place him neatly among his peers, but in [Stevens'] own words, 'plainly to propound.'" I accept this study in the spirit in which it is offered. There are, then, two general questions: How plainly is Stevens' poetry propounded? What more would be required for a full-scale examination?

The abstract thesis of this study is that Stevens' problem is a traditional problem in poetics, the relation of imagination to reality. Stevens make no explicit statement about the nature of imagination, but O'Connor infers one "[The imagination] can create a style, one informed by exuberance, aspiration and a resilient spirit, which at once sustains and expresses human dignity."

The creations of the imagination are fictions. These fictions stand between the brute facts of physical existence and the abstract truth of rational universals. Stevens is not dogmatic about the efficacy of his imaginative fictions. The poet is not a prophet. "[Stevens'] proposal is more modest—that we accept the imagination, and therefore its capacity for helping us live, in esthetic and in moral terms, more humanly. If man cannot be divine, he can be *human*."

Is this the compromise position of relativistic humanism? Or is there a complementary relationship between the truth of the immediacy of existence and the truth of abstract philosophical

problems, a relationship by means of which the poet commits himself to his fictions? Stevens' poetry is, I think, *prima facie* evidence for the view that in his earlier work he devotes himself (almost dedicates himself) to the immediacy of nature, its colors, its lights, and its sounds; in his later work, he is concerned with setting forward his tentative and abstract fictions as substitutes for the truths he has rejected.

Keeping this possible dichotomy in mind, we can turn to O'Connor's specification of the abstract problem. In what particular way does Stevens interpret the relationship of imagination and reality?

We begin with his modernity, with the "climate" of our times. Here again O'Connor seems to impute a sort of humanist role to Stevens. "Poetry should play an important role in the fictions necessary to transform and humanize the world." Stevens is, like almost everyone else, unhappy about our politics, and he comments upon "The Politics of Order" as an important part of "the pressure of reality," a pressure which the poet must resist.

But in *Harmonium* there is little explicit protest. "The Stevens who wrote *Harmonium* was in possession of a world, the esthetic, but the Stevens of *Parts of a World* is in search of one." The Stevens' world is never completed. He goes on from the "parts" to "notes," to *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*. (I think of another title, *Notes Toward the Definition of Culture*.) Stevens' notes are hardly political.

"What should we be without the sexual myth,  
The human revery or poem of death."

The reality which the poet rejects is the political abstraction of the mass man; the realities which he wishes to substitute are the supreme fictions created by imagination. If he denies politics as a reality, then what does he affirm about the nature of imagination?

The imagination springs from an "unthinking source." The symbols of this unthinking source are—the sun as the symbol of the life force, physical existence; the moon, the color blue, and musical instruments as symbols of the creative and transforming imagination. Stevens is a materialist. The only god he mentions



is *Ananke*, necessity. The forms of religion and art are determined by the soil in which they grow—the venereal tropics and the icy north.

The unthinking source is passive; it receives without acting. But the imagination is creative; it transforms things-as-they-are into credible fictions. Poetry is an agent which “becomes intelligible and moving when it informs images, when it creates a mythology.” The images of the subman, the sounds, colors, and the music of the material world are framed in a “legend” of reality. The images are “informed” by the fictions.

According to O'Connor, the abstract themes of Stevens' fictions are love, nobility, and heroism. These attitudes are created by the imagination as the agent which creates values. If we understand “Imagination As the Will of Things,” then the style of poetry is absolutely essential as the framer of attitudes.

Given, then, the materials of physical existence and the informing fictions of imagination, what is the method by which Stevens correlates the images and the fictions? By “Resemblance and Precision.” “By and large, [Stevens] makes a general statement, then proceeds to evoke a fuller sense of it, not merely by imagery but by paradox, puns, antithesis, ambiguity, or direct statement.”

The defense of the imagination rests upon its double concern with both image and fiction. It is a “shaping spirit,” transforming the fury of the unthinking source by fictions which seem “romantic” when they are compared to philosophical abstractions, “intellectual when they are compared to loose and imprecise associations.

Both Coleridge and Stevens write in opposition to rationalist traditions, but O'Connor fails to point out a very important difference in the traditions of intellectual reality against which the poets were protesting. Coleridge was protesting against the imminent triumph of rational idealism; Stevens protests against the accomplished victory of practical reason, or applied science. Coleridge's protest was moon-struck. Stevens' protest is more complicated. He must accept the illumination of the sun, the pressure of reality, and the materialism of both existence and practical science before he can press back against these realities, strumming his blue guitar in the light of the moon.

O'Connor's thesis is based upon the contention that the body of Stevens' poetry represents a unified whole. (This idea was first suggested to me by Marius Bewley in *PARTISAN REVIEW*, September, 1949.) O'Connor maintains that there is an orderly connection between the synesthesia of the early poet and the generalization of the more recent poetry. (Mr. Bewley says that we can understand the early poetry in the light of the later.)

This is a scheme which makes a secure foundation for analysis, but I wonder if it is entirely appropriate to Stevens' poetry. For example, let me contrast two usages of the key term, "supreme fiction." The first occurs in the first volume in "To a High-Toned Christian Woman." In it Stevens seems hardly to be thinking of love, nobility, or heroism. Rather he is railing against idealistic morality and science by means of specific images presented to a specific person. "Poetry is the supreme fiction, *madam*." It shapes or constructs, and it winks or mocks. The second usage is as the title to a later volume in which he says that the supreme fiction must be abstract, must change, and must give pleasure. We must have the universal idea of man as a frame within which we see particular men; we must recognize the transient quality of emotional transformation; and we must see, ultimately, how the imagination, through this emotional change, creates fictions which are the imagination's version of intellectual ideas. He develops these contentions as a doctrine, and this development seems to have only the most tenuous relationship to the first presentation of the supreme fiction in *Harmonium*.

It may be well that there are two Stevens, the early dense materialist and the later ethereal theorist. Stevens has dropped the manner of *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction* in his two most recent volumes, but he has not returned to the style of *Harmonium* and *Ideas of Order*. Could it be that the later poetry just *looks as if* it were a rational justification of the earlier? In that case, we could hardly say that the earlier was written in the expectation of future intellectual illumination, and we need more evidence than O'Connor furnishes for the presence of the abstract themes of nobility, dignity, and love in the earlier volumes. I think we should be keenly suspicious of the imputation of any humanizing function to Stevens. The poet's first job is to demarcate the realm

of the imagination; his job is hardly to set up imperative fictions.

There are several sections of this book which have nothing whatsoever to do with O'Connor's thesis, be it right or wrong. The evidence which he infers from the legend of Stevens' life (presumably because of the lack of any biography), from the "plays," and from Stevens' own prose fragments adds nothing to an understanding of the poetry. This understanding must come from a more exacting scrutiny of the texts than we have had to date.

For instance, O'Connor includes incisive, but undirected analyses of two of Stevens' best poems, "Sea Surface Full of Clouds" and "The Emperor of Ice Cream." It is upon this kind of analysis that any theoretical investigation ought to be based. But O'Connor says that the first poem is not truly representative of Stevens' manner and tone, and he says that the second illustrates the transforming power of imagination. Then the first poem must be dismissed or accounted for, and the transforming power of imagination is a thesis applicable to almost any poet.

The study concludes with unanswered questions which might well have been asked at the beginning.

"Does Stevens' employment of generalized statements and elaborations of his stated themes imply that he is a *reflective* poet? Do his thoughts engender a kind of passivity in which one line or word is associated somewhat loosely with another? If we say, for example, that he is not strictly in the tradition of modernist poets who would create a language in which the images and symbols themselves, rather than generally abstract statements carry the meaning, does it follow that he, like Wordsworth say, reports his feelings...? In other words, if Stevens is not employing the manner we associate with the early Eliot or the manner we associate with Wordsworth, what manner precisely is he employing?"

Precisely.

No one seems reluctant to examine two Eliots. Why not two Stevens?

The examination of the later poetry could very well imitate the precision of the analysis by R. P. Blackmur of Stevens' diction (in *The Double Agent*, 1935). Besides the analysis of the vocabu-

lary, no one seems to have gone very closely into Stevens' skill in rhyme and meter. The whole question of his remarkable titles might be opened. The propriety of writing poems about poetry might be taken as a critical attitude towards the later poet. His debts to French symbolism and eighteenth-century classicism are worth further mention. And all these technical studies might be devoted, as I have suggested, to two aspects of Stevens' poetry—to the early material and to the later imperative idealism.

It is not too early to attempt a full-scale examination, but "full-scale" does not imply that there is an unbroken unity or progress in Stevens' poetry or in his attitudes. The lack of unity could be the veritable clue to the honest difficulties in this great American poet.

WALTER ELDER

VIRGIN LAND: THE AMERICAN WEST AS SYMBOL AND MYTH. By Henry Nash Smith. Harvard University Press. pp. 305. \$4.50 (1950.)

# I

By the time the traders and hunters had moved beyond the "fall line" in the middle seventeenth century, the rigorous environment of colonial America had already lessened the potency of European germs working in the New World. To these men the alluring pull of the great unknown land was the dominant influence in their thinking, in their acting, and in their planning for the future. "An American mind had been created by the silent pressure of environment," wrote Parrington in *Main Currents in American Thought*.

Crevecoeur, Franklin, Emerson, Lincoln, Whitman, and ultimately, Frederick Jackson Turner shared the belief that this country "has been shaped by the pull of a vacant continent." Henry Nash Smith, author of *Virgin Land*, has fallen heir to this belief. He presents a provocative interpretation of the American West as reflected in literature and in social thought. Professor Smith recognizes the Turner hypothesis as the prevailing theory of the significance of the West in this nation's history, and points out that a "whole generation of historians . . . rewrote American

history in terms of it." But he is not so much interested in the Turner hypothesis itself as he is in the climate of opinion which led to its formation and widespread acceptance.

*Virgin Land* is concerned with the "impact of the West on consciousness of Americans and follows the principal consequences of this impact in literature and social thought . . ."

The author's method of investigation is as follows: he makes a brief statement of historical fact; then he examines closely the interplay between the fact, the symbol, and the myth derived from this interplay, in literary or social thought. Thus Professor Smith evaluates both the fact and the symbol, the myth and its manifestation in American thought.

The book is divided into three sections: the first lays the historical and philosophical foundation for studies of the West; the second examines the Western Hero as a symbol; the third interprets the "Myth of the Garden."

## II

In the first section, Smith discusses the two schools of thought prevalent in early American history regarding the course of American civilization, and he discusses the men and their ideas which idealized the fable of "Passage To India" (Walt Whitman's lyrical expression for the northwest passage). One school of thought held that America would become a "mercantilist" trading power with command of both seas; the conflicting view was that the American empire would be an "agrarian" society settling the great inner continent. The mercantilist view was held by the seaboard merchants and investors; the opposite view, by farmers and men of the backwoods.

Thomas Jefferson, the intellectual father of the westward expansion; Senator Thomas Hart Benton, for thirty years the West's champion in Congress; Asa Whitney, propagandist for the Pacific railroad; and William Gilpin, administrator and heir to the thinking of Jefferson and Benton, are the important figures whose ideas Smith studies in investigating the foundation of the Western impact upon literature and social thought. These geographical thinkers are linked with Walt Whitman, whose poetry romanti-

cized the opening of the West, to provide a literary and historical background for the evaluation of the fact, the symbol, and the myth.

### III

The second portion of *Virgin Land* is concerned with Western heroes, such as Daniel Boone and Kit Carson, whose literary realization came in the novels of Cooper and Charles Webber, and finally, in the dime stories of Erastus Beadle. Was Boone the harbinger of civilization, or the man who fled into the unpopulated areas of the forest to seek primitive solitude? Smith concludes that the Western hero could serve either purpose; for Boone's biographers (like Timothy Flint) present contradictory interpretations of Boone's empire building and his primitivism. This conflict is revealed in the novels of Cooper, which Smith treats under the title, "Leatherstocking and the Problem of Social Order." While Cooper was a professed adherent to the principles of social order, he was emotionally stirred by the imaginative ideas of freedom and nature which were found in the primitivism of the Western hero. Cooper never resolved his feeling toward the dilemma; his twenty-five year struggle with the primitive-civilized conflict in the character of Leatherstocking left no conclusion, rather a compromise between the ideas of social order (which the hero must possess if he were fit to be a figure for early American romance) and the savage environmental forces of the Western wilderness.

The evolution of the Western hero, starting with the historical figures of Boone and Carson, was completed in the birth of the dime novel. There was no problem of social order in the Beadle stories, of which Buffalo Bill is the most famous hero. The formula for their popularity was a stereotyped plot filled with action and mystery, illustrating an ever-widening divergence between fact and fiction.

### IV

The third and most important part of the book examines the myth of the garden of the world. Contrary to the ideas of many Easterners, the forces which were to control the destiny of the West were not the wild Western heroes, but the common yeoman

farmer of the Northwest who settled the land instead of moving onward in search of adventures in trapping and trading. Professor Smith recalls that Franklin, Jefferson, and St. John de Crevecoeur laid the philosophical foundations of an agrarian empire. In the nineteenth century, there developed two theories of agrarianism, both off-shoots of the seventeenth-century idea of a great continental empire. One was the theory of plantation economy based on slave ownership; the other, the theory of a yeoman society of the Northwest (before it moved across the Mississippi) made up of small classless farmers. By 1850 Southerners were beginning to become actively hostile to the idea of the yeoman farmer and the "fee-simple empire." The South tried to maintain its hold on the developing Western agrarian empire at the same time that it was trying to hold its position on the question of slavery. But in the end the South failed. The Northwest went with the Union at the beginning of the Civil War.

After analyzing the philosophy behind the agrarian West, examining the role of the yeoman farmer in mid-nineteenth century literature, and illustrating the impact of the myth of the garden, Smith traces the influence of the yeoman in politics, paying particular attention to his role in shaping the politics of the Republican Party and in the formulation of the Homestead Act. By 1865 the yeoman farmer had advanced into eastern Kansas and Nebraska where the whole concept of the Utopian myth of the garden was challenged by the myth of the desert (the desert which had to be conquered by the new techniques of dry farming).

The myth of the garden survived, only to be dispelled by its apparent weakness. Even with the happy farmers laboring in fertile fields, the Utopia had a fault in its vulnerability to economic disaster. The failure of the homestead system, together with the deadening effects of the land speculations and railroad monopolies, destroyed the myth of the garden.

In attempting to trace the place of the agricultural West in literature, Dr. Smith reminds the reader that the men of the frontier provided the writer with ample material for fiction, but, in contrast, the yeoman farmer was not very fascinating material. When the wild West of the frontier became cultivated farm land, and when the Western hero vanished from the frontier hunting

grounds and became a plowman, the idea of the West lost its primitive character. Writers had to struggle with the idea that "their characters had no claim upon the sophisticated readers (of the growing industrial East) except through their alarming... lack of refinement." On the other hand, the Western products of the East's industrial revolution, the rail monopolist and the land speculator, provided a fertile field for the realism of Hamlin Garland. Garland's literature marks the end of a long evolution of varying views about the West. Finally the writer could deal with the human individual apart from the hindrances of "literary convention, class prejudice, or social theory."

## V

In the final chapter, "The Myth of the Garden and Turner's Frontier Hypothesis," Smith analyzes the Turner hypothesis itself, pointing out with incisive understanding some inconsistencies in Turner's statements. Professor Smith quotes a passage from Turner, written after the first World War, which Smith says "is an admission that the notion of democracy born of free land, colored as it is by primitivism, is not an adequate instrument for dealing with a world dominated by industry, urbanization, and international conflicts." Turner failed to take into consideration the conflicting schools of thought, agrarianism and mercantilism, the latter of which has shown itself in the rise of the urbanized East. In a certain sense, Turner's inability to adopt his thesis to historical changes shows what has happened to the American agrarian philosophy when it received the full impact of the Industrial Revolution. The mythic character of the fee-simple empire of the West could find no place to explain the increasing participation by America in world affairs.

The concluding statement of the volume echoes the same dilemma which confronted Cooper and the literary interpreters of the West: "The capital difficulty of the American agrarian tradition is that it accepted the paired but contradictory ideas of nature and civilization as a general principle of historical and social interpretation." The author believes that a "new intellectual system [is] requisite before the West [can] be adequately dealt with in literature or its social development fully understood."



## VI

Dr. Smith does not give the reader any hint that he knows what the requisite "new intellectual system" will be. He states the presence and influence of the myth of the West, and, to some extent, he defends the power and necessity of its existence, but he fails to set forth any new thesis which will embrace both the agrarian and the industrial philosophy in an idea of American civilization.

He makes a competent analysis of the intellectual currents of opinion which led to the formation of the Turner thesis. Although he puts Turner in a larger perspective by giving a rightful place to the integrated findings of the contemporary literary and social historians (who deal with the composite aspects of the West on the consciousness of Americans), the attention of the reader is not attracted often enough toward the underlying parallel between the West as symbol and myth, and the resulting impact on the consciousness of Americans. However, Smith's discussion of the inter-action between the historical fact and the derivative symbol and myth is an exciting exploration in American thought.

Today when the mythical-symbolical significance of the Western agricultural empire is apt to be obscured by the towering factories of the urbanized East, Henry Nash Smith has reaffirmed the West's germinal influence upon the course of American civilization.

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